

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina

January 8, 2024

The President. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Thank you. I rest my case. *[Laughter]*

Audience members. Four more years!

The President. Thank you, please. Thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It's going to go to my head. *[Laughter]*

Please. Thank you. Jim——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. ——you know——just say one thing about what Jim has been talking about that confuses me about our Republican friends sometimes, the MAGA Republicans. No, I mean this—I'm being sincere.

Every one of the things that Jim mentioned saves the American taxpayer billions of dollars. You realize, if you have a prescription drug from any major drug company in America, I can take you to Toronto, Canada, London, Rome, any major capital in the world, and buy the same exact drug for sometimes half the price that you get here.

Look, folks, when the Federal Government, through Medicare, doesn't have to pay out as much money, it means taxpayers pay less money, because you fund the Federal Government, you fund Medicare.

Go down every one of these things—it always confused me. They talk about being rational; it's just about excess profit. But any rate, I don't want to get off on that. I'll get carried away. *[Laughter]* I don't quite get these guys.

Thank you, Jim, for your friendship and, above all, for your fellowship. And, Bishop Green, thank you for those kind words. I mean that sincerely. And thank you, Reverend Manning, for, you know—the shepherd of this house—to allow me to stand at this podium once again. And to all the faithful of Mother Emanuel and distinguished guests.

I was talking downstairs. I've spent more time in the Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, Delaware, than I have—than most people I know, Black or White—*[laughter]*—have spent in that church. *[Laughter]* Because that's where I started—no, I'm serious. It started with the civil rights movement. I used to go to 7:30 Mass, then I'd go to 10 o'clock service with the reverend who was then running the church, who's now the bishop. She's the bishop. And I'm told your bishop had been there before, in South Africa, because that's where he is right now.

The point is that I've been blessed to worship here before as well. You know, it's—at moments of joy and—great joy and moments of great pain, in moments of unbearable loss.

On June 17, 2015, the beautiful souls, five survivors—and five survivors invited a stranger into this church to pray with them. The word of God was pierced by bullets in hate and rage, propelled by not just gunpowder, but by a poison, a poison that's for too long haunted this Nation.

And what is that poison? White supremacy. Oh, it is. It's a poison. Throughout our history, it's ripped this Nation apart. This has no place in America. Not today, tomorrow, or ever.

From that day, this Nation saw this congregation, this community demonstrate one of the greatest acts of strength I have ever seen—I mean it sincerely, from the bottom of my—the act of forgiveness, the act of grace. It was, as President Obama sang from here, "Amazing Grace."

You changed hearts. You did something that may not have happened but for your courage. You brought down the Confederate flag in South Carolina. You brought it down. [Applause] No—you did. And you helped the Nation heal. You showed what America can overcome, what we can be when we want to be something.

I'm deeply humbled to speak from this same pulpit my friend—and he was a friend—Reverend Pinckney spoke from. We all miss him, none more than his family and this congregation. But just as all the families of the Emanuel Nine miss the pieces of their soul that they lost that day, we also have been together at moments of unbearable loss for my family.

Two days after the service of Reverend Pinckney, my son and I—my surviving son and I came back. My family worshiped with you here, Sunday service, to show our solidarity. But my family also needed to be healed. We didn't even realize how badly.

Just 22 days before, we had buried my son Beau, a veteran exposed and died because of those burn pits in Iraq for a year. We were—we were in more pain than we knew. We came here to offer comfort and received comfort from you. No, I'm serious.

As I listened in the pews, spent time with the families, visited Reverend Pinckney's office, visited the memorial for the victims outside, I grew stronger. My son, my family grew stronger.

We prayed together. We grieved together. We found hope together, for real—for real. And you know, it reminds me that, through our pain, each of us—each of us—must find purpose. For me, that purpose was to live a life worthy of my son Beau. And I mean it sincerely. For you, that purpose is for the lives worthy of loved ones lost—to make them proud.

So many of you were there for us during that loss, including my dear friend Jim and Emily Clyburn. Ms. Emily I miss. People of deep faith. Jim, a great public servant and the best friend you could ever have.

Jim, I'm thinking of Emily today, and we talked about it downstairs a little bit. I know you do every single, solitary day. She was special. And that bond you shared was something to behold.

As many of you know, Jim is a teacher and a student of history. He knows the power of history. He knows the power of truth and the power of lies. He knows what happens when people are allowed to whitewash history, erase history, bury history. He knows what the Bible teaches. We shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free.

But the truth—the truth—is under assault in America. As a consequence, so is our freedom, our democracy, our very country because, without the truth, there is no light. Without light, there's no path from this darkness.

Audience member. If you really care about the lives lost here, then you should honor the lives lost and call for a cease-fire in Palestine!

Audience members. Cease-fire now! Cease-fire now! Cease-fire now!

The President. That's all right. That's all right. That's all right.

Audience member. Will you call for a cease-fire?

Audience members. Cease-fire now! Cease-fire now! Cease-fire now!

[*At this point, security staff escorted some members of the audience out of the sanctuary.*]

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Look, folks, I understand their—I understand their passion. And I've been quietly working—I've been quietly working with the Israeli Government to get them to reduce and significantly get out of Gaza. I've been using all that I can to do that.

But I understand the passion.

Look, folks, after the Civil——

Audience member. You're an understanding person. You're an understanding person.

The President. Thank you.

Audience member. They don't realize that. You're a good man.

The President. Well, thank you.

Look, after the Civil War, the defeated Confederates couldn't accept the verdict of the war: They had lost. So they say, they embraced what's known as the Lost Cause, a self-serving lie that the Civil War was not about slavery, but about States' rights. And they've called that the noble cause.

That was a lie, a lie that had—not just a lie but it had terrible consequences. It brought on Jim Crow. So let me be clear for those who don't seem to know: Slavery was the cause of the Civil War. There is no negotiation about that.

Now—now—we're living in an era of a second lost cause. Once again, there are some in this country trying—trying—to turn a loss into a lie, a lie, which if allowed to live, will once again bring terrible damage to this country. This time, the lie is about the 2020 election, the election in which you made your voices heard and your power known.

Just 2 days ago, we marked the third anniversary of the dark—one of the darkest days in American history: January the 6th, the day in which insurrectionists stormed the United States Capitol, trying for the first time in American history to stop the peaceful transfer of power in the country.

We all saw with our own eyes the truth of what happened. That violent mob was whipped up by lies from a defeated former President—smashing windows, smearing blood on statues, ransacking offices. Outside, insurrectionists erected gallows, chanting "Hang Mike Pence." Inside, they hunted for Nancy Pelosi, chanting "Where's Nancy?"

We saw something on January 6 we'd never seen before, even during the Civil War. Insurrectionists waving Confederate flags inside the halls of Congress built by enslaved Americans. A mob attacked and called Black officers, Black veterans defending the Nation those vile of racist names.

And yet an extreme movement of America, the MAGA Republicans, led by a defeated President, is trying to steal history now. They tried to steal an election. Now they're trying to steal history, telling us that violent mob was, and I quote, "a peaceful protest."

That that insurrection—those insurrectionists were—these are his words—"patriots." That there was, quote, "a lot of love that day." In fact, the rest of the Nation and the world saw a lot of hate and violence.

For hours, the defeated former President sat in the private dining room off of my—off of the Oval Office and did nothing, nothing—absolutely nothing. His actions were among the worst derelictions of duty by any President in American history. An attempt—[*applause*]. An attempt to overturn a free and fair election by force and violence.

Let me say what others cannot. We must reject political violence in America. Always—not sometimes, always. It's never appropriate.

The violence of January 6 was an extension of an old playbook from the—from the threats and violence and intimidation.

In Atlanta, Georgia, two brave Black women, mother and daughter—Ruby Freeman and Shaye Moss—they had their lives upended just doing their jobs—menacing calls, death threats, forcing them to literally flee their homes.

Those pushing the "big lie" have a conspiracy theory among conspiracy theories that outweighs them all that there's what—and—but here is the fact. There is where we don't have facts—their whole theory has no facts, has no proof, has no evidence. That's why, time and again, they lost in every court of law that challenged the results—60 losses in courts of America.

There's one thing they don't have. They don't have respect for the 81 million people who voted the other way—voted for my candidacy—and voted to end the Presidency.

In their world, these Americans, including you, don't count. But that's not the real world. That's not democracy. That's not America. In America, we all count. In America, we witness to serve all those who, in fact, participate. And losers are taught to concede when they lose. And he's a loser.

Then we all came together to put the country before ourselves.

The lies that led to January 6 are part of a broader attack on the truth America today that we all have seen before. The same movement that, throughout the mob at the United States Capitol, isn't just trying to rewrite history of January 6, they're trying to determine to erase history and your future: banning books; denying your right to vote and have it counted; destroying diversity, equality, inclusion all across America; harboring hate and replacing hope with anger and resentment and a dangerous view of America.

That narrow view of America, a zero-sum view of America that says: "If you win, I lose. If you succeed, it must be, I failed. If you get ahead, I fall behind." And maybe worst of all, "If I hold you down, I lift myself up."

That's not new in America. Every stride forward has often been met with ferocious backlashes from those who fear the progress, from those who exploit that fear for their own personal gain, from those who traffic in lies told for profit and power.

But here in Charleston, you know the power of truth. Less than a mile from here was once a port where almost half of all enslaved Africans were trafficked to North America and forced on our shores.

And now you have a world-class museum there to tell the truth about the original sin. And it matters. And I want to thank former Mayor Jim [Joe; White House correction] Riley for his leadership, who saw to it the museum was built, and for all of you who made that happen.

And with your help, I made Juneteenth the first Federal holiday since Dr. Martin Luther King's Day.

[The President picked up a handheld microphone.]

This works?

Why? Because the truth matters. The truth matters.

With your help, we established the national monument—monument in honor of Mamie and Emmett Till because we heard Mrs. Till's call—the mother of a 14-year-old son who was lynched and whose body was mutilated, but the mother insisted on an open casket at his funeral because she said, "Let the world see what I saw."

The truth matters. It always matters. We can't just to learn—choose to learn what we want to know and not what we should know. We should know the good, the bad, the truth of who we are.

That's what great nations do, and we're a great nation, the greatest of all nations. We're not perfect. But at our best, we learn from our past, and we look to the future. A nation continuously striving to be a more perfect Union.

I'm here to speak to another truth. It's because of this congregation and the Black community of South Carolina and—not an exaggeration—and Jim Clyburn that I stand here today as your President—because of all of you. That's a fact. *[Applause]* That's a fact. And I owe you.

Audience member. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. And I've done my best to honor your trust. That means rejecting the small, narrow, cramped view of America as well as lifting up a bigger and broader view of America that holds that: "If you do well, I do well. We all do well."

We all do well if every race and background in small towns and big cities is doing better; when our freedoms are protected and we deny hate as a safe harbor; where everyone has a fair shot at a life of dignity and opportunity; and where our democracy works for everybody.

That benefits everybody. I don't get these guys. Everybody does better, even those folks who disagree with us. And I'm keeping my commitment to you. That's the America we're building together. Instead of erasing history, we're making history.

And it starts—*[applause]*. And it starts with an administration I committed to—I said my administration would look like America and taps into our full talents and strengths as a nation, starting with our incredible Vice President, Kamala Harris.

When we came to office, the country was in a depth of a pandemic which we lost over a million 200,000 people, so we moved heaven and earth to get the country vaccinated, saving countless lives. With the economy on the brink, we spent—we sent \$1,400 checks into the pockets of people who are hurting badly, keep them going.

I said we'd invest in all of America—all America—and we are. The results are clear: over 14 million new jobs, record economic growth, the lowest inflation rate of any major economy in the world. But we have more to do.

We see this progress for all Americans. We have the lowest Black unemployment rate recorded in a long, long time. More Blacks, Americans have health insurance than ever, bringing peace of mind and dignity to their lives.

I remember when I was a kid. We lived in a three-bedroom house with four kids and a grandpop living with us. And my headboard in my room was up against—it was a little split-level

home. It was a—we weren't poor. We were—anyway, we weren't—we sure weren't worth—the wealthy.

And I remember really, one night, hearing my dad was restless, because the headboard was along my headboard, on the other side of the wall. And I asked my mom the next morning, I said, "What's the matter with Dad?" She said, "Honey, his employer just told him they're dropping health insurance."

What that does is, it deprives a man and a woman of their dignity. How do you look at your child and say: "I can't cover you. I can't take care of you."

And now, as Jim pointed out at one point—I won't go into it like I was going to because he said it better—instead of about an average of \$400 a month for insulin for seniors with diabetes, we're now paying \$35 a month. And by the way, they're still making a profit three times. It costs \$10 to make it.

And I've been trying to take on—as a couple of you in the audience know from my entire career—Big Pharma. Finally beat them. Finally, finally, finally.

And we're going to go back and make sure that Medicare can negotiate prices for everybody, not just for seniors. Again, it saves the American taxpayers billions of dollars not having to pay Pharma for these things.

You know, we're growing back—Black wealth, and we have a lot more to do. The racial wealth gap is the smallest it's been in 20 years under my watch. More Black small businesses starting up than in decades in the ultimate act—opening a new business is the ultimate act of hope.

We're taking on housing discrimination in many ways. So a home owned by—today, a home owned by a Black family on one side of a highway, built by the same builder on the other side of the highway and a White guy living in it, the White guy's home is valued more than the Black guy's.

No, I know you know it. But guess what? That's how you build generational wealth, when you build your home.

Kamala and I are leading the charge of—mainly Kamala—to protect the freedom to vote and that vote—that be counted. Defending your freedom to choose. We're keeping our commitment of providing incredible opportunities, making historic investments in HBCUs: \$7 billion—\$7 billion.

They're just as good as other universities, just only that they don't have the billionaire contributors, so they can't put the laboratories together to get the contracts to be the ones that design new aircraft carrier decks, being the ones to design—what's changing—it's changing.

Providing people a real shot by reducing the burden of student debt—Jim went into it; I won't go into it as I was going to—\$132 billion [million; White House correction], 3.6 million people—a significant percentage of those students are African American students—despite our friends on the other side of the table, the Supreme Court did [doing; White House correction] everything we [they; White House correction] can to stop me.

Replacing every lead pipe in America. You know how many—not just some. Every single lead pipe in America is going to be taken out and replaced with a—[inaudible].

Why? Because in mostly poor neighborhoods, that's where those lead pipes are. And that's why kids end up with brain damage because of the lead. There's so—I'm not going to go into it. But look, you can turn on a faucet for your child and doesn't get sick from drinking water in their—coming into the home.

Delivering high-speed internet that's affordable for everybody—everybody—so you don't have to sit in the McDonald's parking lot for your child to do their homework. Producing clean energy so you can finally breathe clean air without leaving home.

Look, I understand it. When we moved from Scranton—I was raised in Claymont, Delaware. More major refineries than any place, including Houston, Texas, and just across the border in Chester. Not a joke.

I grew up with asthma, and most of us did, because of the prevailing winds. We'd go—my mom would drive us to school in the morning when I was young—grade school—turn on—when there was a frost, turn on the windshield wipers, there would be an oil slick on the wiper. Because guess what? It's all the fenceline communities who get hurt.

Not on my watch. It's changing.

We know there's more to do: making childcare and eldercare more affordable, which would save American taxpayers billions of dollars along the way.

Early in my administration, we were out—we cut child poverty in half—child poverty—Black child poverty in half by getting families checks every month through the childcare tax credit. And the other side had—went ahead and blocked it. But we're going to get it back.

This—[*applause*]. Look, this fight isn't over. We're going to come back. Because no child in America should ever go to bed hungry, period, period, period, period.

After the historic movement for justice in the summer of 2020, I signed the most significant police reform Executive order in history. We didn't get the law passed, but guess what? I did it by Executive order, a significant part of it. But now Congress has to step up and ask and get it—do what I did and make it the law of the land.

Just a few days ago, the defeated former President was asked about the recent shooting in Iowa. Did you hear this one? I'm—it's hard to believe. You know what his response was, all those kids dead? We "have to get over it," end of quote.

I promise you——

[*The President made the sign of the cross.*]

We "have to get over it." My response is: We have to stop it so your children, your family, your friends can leave your home, walk the streets, go to stores, go to the grocery store, and go to church, to be safe from gun violence. There's no excuse for this carnage.

We have to ban assault weapons. I did it once before, and I'm going to come back again and do it. Ban high-capacity magazines. We have to pass a—universal background checks. It doesn't violate the Second Amendment. It's common sense, and it saves lives.

I'm determined to continue to deliver on equal justice under the law. I made a commitment to you to nominate the first Black woman—and Jim has already talked about it—on the Supreme Court. And by the way, she's smarter than the rest of these guys. [*Laughter*] Whoa. Her name is Ketanji Brown Jackson. Well, guess what? She knows what she's doing.

And by the way, as Jim pointed out, more Black women have been appointed to the Federal Circuit Courts than every other President in American history has appointed, every single, solitary one counted. And we're going to keep going.

Look, I want to make it clear: You all made this possible because of your voice. Your voice was heard in shaping your destiny. That's democracy.

And I'm proud to have led the effort to make sure your voice, the South Carolina voice, will always be heard, because now you're first in the primary.

Look, our North Star as a nation is the very idea of an American [America; White House correction]—an idea, at once the most simple and most powerful idea in the history of the world—that's not hyperbole—a fact. The idea is this: We're all created in the image of God equally. We deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives. That covenant—it's a covenant we made with each other, a covenant we've never fully lived up to, but we've never fully walked away from either.

And faith and history teach us that however dark the night, joy cometh in the morning. And that joy comes with commands from scripture: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy mind, all thy soul," and "Love your neighbor as thyself." Not so easy. It's hard. But in those commands is the essence of the gospel and the essence of the American promise.

And in my life, I've tried to live my faith. And I've many times failed. But I've learned, as many of you might have learned in your path as well, we're all—we're all—imperfect beings. We don't know where fate will take us or when. But we can do our best to seek a life of light, hope, love, and justice and truth.

Folks, let me close with this. Denmark Vesey arrived in Charleston enslaved—one of too many—too many from a distant shores, wrenched from painful—on a painful journey, not to a promised land, but to a land that promised to deprive them of freedom.

But even though they arrived in the land where the life and rife of [a land that would be rife with; White House correction] pain and persecution, they still believed they had promise, and the Black Church kept them moving. They had faith. They found scripture. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen.

Vesey had his kind of faith. He became a carpenter and a movement leader concerned with the least among us. That's why he helped found this very church 200 years ago. Only 40 years after the Declaration of Independence, in this church, your church now, the Black Church has come to—come to symbolize the faith and this purpose, to bear witness to those who are suffering, to bring the good news of a future to come, to follow its mission to be the light in the pathway of darkness.

That's patriotism. That's patriotism: to love something so much you make it better, no matter the struggle; a patriotism that inspired generation before us to believe that in America we can do and be anything we want to be.

In our time, there's still the old ghost of new—in new garments. And we all need to rise to meet the moment, and the moment is now.

Folks, my fellow Americans, this is a time of choosing, so let us choose the truth. Let us choose America. I know—I know—we can do it together. And as the gospel song sings: "We've come too far from where we started. Nobody told me the road would be easy." "I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me."

My fellow Americans, I don't think the good Lord brought us this far to leave us behind.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:41 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. James E. Clyburn, who introduced the President; Samuel L. Green, Sr., presiding bishop, Seventh District African

Methodist Episcopal Church in Columbia, SC; Eric S.C. Manning, pastor, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church; Silvester Scott Beaman, former pastor, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, DE; Felecia Sanders and her granddaughter, Jennifer Pinckney and her daughter Malana, and Polly Sheppard, survivors of the shootings at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, on June 17, 2015; Dylann S. Roof, accused gunman in the shootings at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church; former President Donald J. Trump; former Vice President Michael R. Pence; Rep. Nancy Pelosi, in her former capacity as Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Ruby Freeman and her daughter Wandrea "Shaye" Moss, former employees in the Elections Department of Fulton County, GA. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brothers James B. and Francis W. Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC.

Locations: Charleston, SC.

Names: Beaman, Scott; Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Clyburn, James E.; Freeman, Ruby; Green, Samuel L., Sr.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Manning, Eric S.C.; Moss, Wandrea ArShaye "Shaye"; Obama, Barack; Owens, Valerie Biden; Pelosi, Nancy; Pence, Michael R.; Pinckney, Jennifer; Pinckney, Malana; Riley, Joseph P., Jr.; Roof, Dylann S.; Sanders, Felecia; Sheppard, Polly; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Air pollution, public health impact; Book bans in public and school libraries; Broadband and wireless technologies; Childcare, access and affordability; COVID-19 pandemic; COVID-19 vaccines; Diversity, equity, and inclusion, improvement efforts; Economic improvement; Eldercare and home health services; Environmental justice; Federal court nominations and confirmations; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Housing discrimination, efforts to combat; Inflation; Insulin cost controls; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Job creation and growth; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Poverty reduction efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Renewable energy sources and technologies; Slavery, U.S. (historical); Small businesses, promotion efforts; South Carolina, 2015 shooting in Charleston; South Carolina, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston; South Carolina, President's visit; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Unemployment rate; Vice President; Voter participation; Voting rights, protection efforts.

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